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NEWSHEET
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Following is part of a lecture by Mr. M. Miller, F.R.A.S., of Mount Stromlo Observatory, A.C.T. This lecture was presented in the Academy of Science during the recent CAPIO Convention held in Canberra from June 8th.- 10th.

THE TECHNIQUES OF VISUAL OBSERVATION

Astronomers are particularly disgusted when people report the planet Venus as an unidentified flying object. Yet it happens again and again, whenever Venus is near western elongation. Such reports reflect very poorly on the quality of the observations. Tonight I am concerned with this question, how can useful observations be made of unusual objects in the sky? The observers must be perfectly familiar with those objects which are well known to the scientific and technical community. There is no escaping the necessity for those who hope to observe new objects to be familiar with many phenomena of astronomy and meteorology. They should also be familiar with aircraft types and have some knowledge of the type of flight pattern flown by commercial, military and research aircraft. For instance, could you identify a U2 at 70,000 feet? A space tracking calibration aircraft? Observers should also have some idea of the principles of aerodynamics and propulsion if they are to avoid arousing the ridicule of scientists with meaningless statements such as "propelled by invisible electric rays." I do not mean that if a space vehicle from another world arrived on Earth it would have to be propelled by a method familiar to us - in fact this seems to me quite unlikely - but it is quite certain that whatever system of propulsion was used, the physical laws of the universe would not be violated.

It is evident, then, that there are many pitfalls for the would-be observer of UFOs, not least of which is his or her eagerness to see some particular kind of thing. Scientists learned long ago that when you expect to see a particular thing, it is very difficult to give an accurate description of what you saw if it happened to be different. However, these difficulties of perception are the field of the psychologists.

My field is astronomy, and I wish to stress these aspects of it which are relevant to the UFO movement. Firstly, the astronomical phenomena which may be mistaken for UFOs. Secondly, the importance of accurate observations, even without any instruments.

First - how is an individual, without special training, to distinguish between ordinary astronomical objects (such as planets, meteors, meteor trails and satellites) and those objects which require some other explanation? I can only urge that those who hope to observe UFOs should make themselves familiar with astronomy at least to the degree that will enable them to identify the brighter planets and stars. Each of the naked-eye planets is distinctive in its combination of colour, brightness and movement in the sky. Mercury is never far from the Sun and is a

faint morning or evening star. Venus is the brightest of all after the Sun and Moon. It, too, is seen as a morning or evening star but it has in addition the unusual characteristic of being visible during the day, a characteristic which has led to many reports of a mysterious object hovering in the sky. Jupiter is not as bright as Venus and can be seen at any point along the ecliptic, unlike Venus which can never be high in the sky at night. Mars is distinctly reddish and sometimes quite bright (it will be very bright in 1971 August when it will be at its closest for many years). Saturn is of an orange tint and usually not as bright as Mars. Only two other planets are usually seen with the naked eye and they are indistinguishable from faint stars to all except the most experienced observers.

Meteors are visible on every clear night, but big ones are unusual. The brightest of all are known as fireballs and bolides, and they may be visible in full daylight. They are usually accompanied by explosive noises, possibly ordinary shock waves due to their hypersonic velocity, but perhaps a real explosive break-up, for meteorite falls are often in the form of numerous fragments. However, the most spectacular meteorite event is basically a simple whizz-bang affair, following a slightly curved ballistic trajectory which may be seen to end at the ground. There may be a smoke trail left in the sky which can persist for many minutes. But it seems unlikely that a good observer would ever mistake one of these for a vehicle directed by intelligence. They have more the appearance of a catastrophe!

Satellites, of which there are literally thousands in orbit about our planet - counting all the fragments - are easily mistaken for aircraft. On re-entry - a rare event - they look like natural meteors. Identification depends on several distinguishing features - lack of all sound distinguishes them from most aircraft, and while they may move in any direction and their path may appear slightly curved, they never appear to change either direction or speed. The speeds at which they seem to pass among the stars fall within a definite range, which one can learn by observation of the Echo and Pageos satellites on any clear night. They pass suddenly into the Earth's shadow cone and disappear in a characteristic way.

No other astronomical object is likely to be mistaken for anything else. Comets do not flash across the sky as a few people still imagine; when you have seen a few you would never fail to identify one. Most comets are reported in the press long before they become visible to the naked eye because astronomers find them (often by accident) with powerful instruments while they are quite faint.

I would like now to proceed to my second topic, the technique of visual observations. These can be made without instruments, which is just as well, for those who suddenly find themselves confronted with an unusual moving object in the sky.

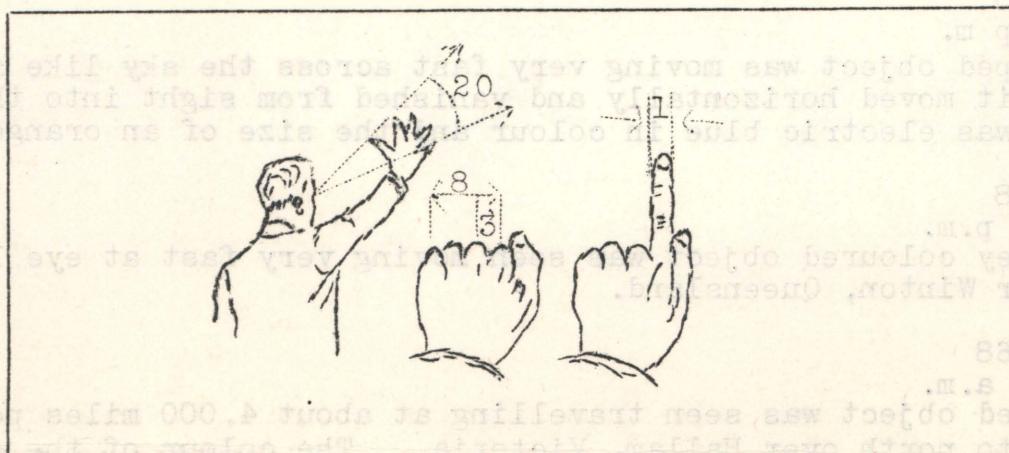
Bad or poor observations we have in great numbers. You have all read them - "it was as big as a football" - "it was as big as the Moon" - "it was left of Mount Ainslie going towards Cooma" - and so on.

Briefly, there are three things we can state about most moving objects in the sky. These are position, direction of motion and brightness. There is no need for a compass if we can relate to known object, for example "5 degrees west of Venus" or "18 degrees above the horizon a bit south of west". How can we measure these important angles? Luckily there is an easy way. We should all learn it by heart.

For directions we must at least have some idea of the location of the cardinal points so that we can say whether it was North, South, East or West. Learn to find south from the stars, summer and winter. Learn where the Sun is (north at noon, rising north of east and setting north of west in winter, rising south of east and setting south of west in summer). Now you can say "it was 8 degrees north of east". Learn at least the brighter stars in the sky, and you can say "it was 12 degrees west of Canopus".

Brightness, or magnitude, is harder. The Moon is not a good yard-stick because it changes enormously in brightness during the month. How much brighter do you think the full Moon is than the half Moon? Nine times brighter at full than at half! Be careful, then, about saying "it was as bright as the Moon" - which Moon? Even astronomers find it hard to instantly estimate the brightness of faint objects; bright ones are even harder because the sensitivity of the eye changes.

For moving objects, an estimate of velocity is useful. Do not try to estimate miles per hour, except for aircraft types with which you are familiar. IT CANNOT BE DONE. The only possible kind of measurement you can make is "it moved 60 degrees during the ten seconds I had it in view". You do not know the SIZE or the DISTANCE or the true direction of the object. All you can see is the "angular motion" as we say. A meteor coming almost straight towards you at 50 kilometres per second (not an unusual sight - one I have often seen) hardly seems to move at all. If you can do so, count seconds, use your watch or count heart-beats to give a figure for angular distance covered in a given time. Combined with the estimates of two other observers at different places, this could enable the true speed and direction to be calculated fairly accurately. You can not do it alone, so if you tell the press the speed and direction from your own observation only, every scientist and most technically trained people will rubbish you - and quite rightly. Be a good observer if you believe your observations are worthwhile. Better observations will lead to more identifications.



The above illustration shows how one's own hand can be used to obtain an estimate of degree measurement.

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SIGHTINGS:

Date 2/1/68

Time 9.15 p.m.

A circular blue coloured object about the size of the Moon moved slowly from overhead and disappeared in a south-westerly direction. This object was observed in Brisbane.

Date 25/2/68

Time 11.00 p.m.

An object about the size of a star was moving faster than a jet aircraft from east to west.

Date 2/4/68

Time 6.35 p.m.

An object was moving from north-west to south-east and disappeared behind trees. It was an elongated light similar to the glow from a burning gas jet. The colour was duck-egg blue with a white light nearest to the observer. A fringe of orange light was visible near the tail.

Date Early February

Time 8.50 to 9.00 p.m.

An object moved very fast across the sky in a tremendous semi-circle from north-west to south-east. The size was a pin-point of light, orange in colour.

SIGHTINGS (CONTINUED).

Date 9/3/68

Time 5.30 p.m.

A disc shaped object was travelling silently in a south-westerly direction when observed from Woodfield, Victoria. It had a bump in the centre of it and it was about 20 feet across.

Date 11/3/68

Time 1.30 a.m.

A saucer shaped object moved very slowly, almost hoveringly, towards the south-west. It was observed over Mordialloc, Victoria. It then turned and disappeared at a tremendous speed leaving a grey trail which was still visible after the object had disappeared. A bright yellow-orange light was emitted from the dome of the object and this light lit up the grey coloured base.

Date 2/4/68

Time 6.40 p.m.

An oval shaped object was moving very fast across the sky like a shooting star, then it moved horizontally and vanished from sight into the air. The object was electric blue in colour and the size of an orange.

Date 2/8/68

Time 10.00 p.m.

A silver grey coloured object was seen moving very fast at eye level like a comet over Winton, Queensland.

Date 12/1/68

Time 10.50 a.m.

A disc shaped object was seen travelling at about 4,000 miles per hour from south to north over Hallam, Victoria. The colour of the object was black and there appeared to be a raised portion in the centre.

Date Early March 1966

Time 1.30 a.m.

A red elliptical object was first observed very close to the ground. A humming noise was heard being emitted from it. The humming noise increased in intensity and then the object took off at tremendous speed.

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AMATEUR PROSPECTOR SERIOUSLY BURNED BY UFO IN CANADA.

(Condensed from an article in "Spacelink" - vol 5 number 1)

Credit: CAPRO, Box 1316, Winnipeg 1, Manitoba, Canada.

On May 20th. 1967, Steve Michalak of Winnipeg, Canada was doing some weekend prospecting near Falcon Lake about 75 miles east of Winnipeg. He looked up to see two red glowing elliptical objects flying towards him. One machine was a mere 10 feet off the ground, while the one behind appeared to be higher. The first machine landed and the second left the way it had come. The glow from the landed object soon disappeared and it looked like two stainless steel saucers placed together, although the top half had a large central dome. Heat radiated from the side of the craft and Michalak reported hearing a constant whistling noise.

The craft was about 35 feet across and 8 feet to the top of the flattened dome. After about 30 minutes, during which time Michalak watched and sketched it, a door slid open in the lower half. From the opening came a violet light so brilliant that Michalak was obliged to put on his welding glasses. He then saw, inside, blinking red, white and blue lights. Curious, he decided to approach the craft and tried to touch it. However, his rubber glove suddenly melted and his hand slid off the machine's side.

He thought he heard voices and tried answering them in Russian, Polish, German and Italian but there was no answer. However, the door closed without any sign of a join and the machine began a counter-clockwise rotation. It quickly took off and gave out such a powerful blast of

heat that Michalak's clothing was burnt and a grassfire started.

Stunned, burnt and feeling sick Michalak drove back to Falcon Lake. He was found to have second and third degree burns on his face and chest and complained of a strange odour from inside him. For four days he was unable to keep any food down and after a week in bed had lost about 22 lbs. A radiation test proved negative but a blood count was found to be significantly below normal. His face appeared severely sunburnt and on his chest appeared a strange checked pattern. The symptoms, taken all together, suggested that he was suffering from radiation burns.

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INTERESTED IN TELESCOPES ?

Member, Mr. Wood of Altona, has nine telescopes and a number of eye-pieces for viewing at varying magnifications. If any members are interested in astronomy and telescopes he will be delighted to assist by giving advice on the subjects and suggests that you contact him by mail at the following address:

30 Bayview Street, ALTONA, 3018.

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HOAX OR HALLUCINATION?

Further facts have come to light about "The Scoriton Mystery". This book, by Eileen Buckle, makes much of Arthur Bryant and his contact claim. His claim, to have met three Venusians on Dartmoor, is now considered to have been false.

Before he died on June 24th 1967, he was known to be suffering from the effects of a longstanding brain tumor. The doctors attending him, together with his widow, consider that his story was hallucinatory.

The co-compiler of the book, Mr. Norman Oliver, and Mrs. Bryant have made known certain facts which make Bryant's story appear false.

Bryant's doctors considered that he had woven everyday items into his story and that, in fact, his story was only an hallucination!

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AUGUST GENERAL MEETING:

The General Meeting to be held on Friday, August 2nd at 8 p.m. will cater especially for the needs of new members who wish to know something of the history of UFO research for 1946 until the present day. Members of the Committee will lecture on various aspects of UFO research, assisted by slides and tape recordings.

A special feature will be an exhibition of photographs and other material prepared from the Society's files by our Support Sub-Committee. The meeting will be open to the public and it is hoped that our members, both new and old, will come along and help make the meeting a success. Remember, if you have any questions on UFO's you want answered - this is your opportunity to ask them!

ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, September 6th at 8 p.m.

The Elections will be held at this meeting for the following positions:

President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee.

Nominations for the above positions, signed by the proposee and candidate, should reach the Secretary by not later than 12 noon on Friday the 23rd August.

All meetings of the Society are held in Jerram Hall, corner Spring Street and Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

HELP NEEDED.

The Committee is in urgent need of assistance from members with Secretarial or book-keeping experience. Any member able and willing to help please contact the Secretary.

LIBRARY:

Many new titles have recently been purchased for the Library. Members interested in borrowing them are urged to write to Librarian Mrs. Kathy Valente for an up-to-date book list.